

SMALL FARM ECONOMY

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labors, for all the tasks not strictly connected with the household fall in their province. We shall have occasion later to examine fully the sexual dichotomy of labor such a division of tasks represents.

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For the countryman the Christmas season, from the beginning of Advent to Epiphany or "Little Christmas" (January 6), is the dead of winter. It is a period in which all farm work is at a standstill. The farmer has completed the last of his harvest and brought in the last of his potatoes from the field. The cattle are securely housed against the winter cold. The farmer feels himself free to sit round the house during the cold wet days and devote his season to holiday. The working day is at its shortest. Outside, the weather is usually unsettled, a cold rain falling on the sodden fields. It is for him as though the course of the year had stopped and were waiting, gathering its forces for the new year.

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It is a period of great social activity in the local community. The very important religious ceremonies of the season call forth an intensified activity in the parish. There are constant visits back and forth; each house is ready to offer its hospitality to its neighbors; and the community gives itself over to dances, cards, talk, and calls. Not until the religious season closes with Epiphany does the countryman feel that the year begins anew.

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With the beginning of the year, the cold uncertain weather with its succession of bitter wet days, leaving the fields too wet to work, does not end, but the Christmas season has marked the transition. The farmer must now make his plans for the spring planting, lay in his seed, repair machinery, and make ready for the season about to begin. On drier days he can busy himself in the field in cleaning ditches and drainages. In the evenings much of the conversation on visits and at home revolves round the coming planting, and both new and traditional experience with

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42 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN IRELAND

221 types, varieties, growth cycles, yields, and care of seeds and  
521 cattle passes round by word of mouth.

[805] The first of February, St. Brigid's Day, marks the begin-  
221 ning of spring. For the countryman the return of the  
● 132 "hard" days of wind and clear weather herald the season of  
241 the land's drying off. Through February and March the  
gardens must be prepared, potatoes planted, and the fields  
made ready for the return of the cattle to them. Each hard  
day is a welcome opportunity, for only then can work in the  
fields go on. With favorable weather, the work of prepara-  
tion is over in the beginning of March, and the actual  
planting begins. By St. Patrick's Day, with its promise of  
continuous hard weather, the gardens are ready for a second  
planting.

221 The potatoes demand the greatest attention. A fortnight  
241 after they are planted, they must be manured well with  
manure brought from the pile near the cattle cabins, and  
the ground must be leveled so that the plant will not go  
to stalk and thus fail to produce tubers. A fortnight more  
and the ground must be "softened" and the earth round  
the plant, which now shows its first leaves, must be "stirred."  
By the time May is reached, the potatoes must be "landed."  
Earth must be taken from between the long ridges in which  
the potatoes are planted and heaped up over them from each  
side. Thereafter nothing remains until the harvest but a  
summer spraying against blight.

221 Throughout the spring the cattle have demanded atten-  
231 tion. March and April see the birth of calves and the  
438 beginning of the milk season and intensified butter-making.  
The great spring cattle fairs take place. The farmer must  
devote himself to the all-important business of buying and  
selling his milch and store cattle and his calves. At home  
the cattle demand constant care against hunger, disease, and  
cold as he mixes their diet of fast diminishing hay with the  
slowly returning pasture grass.

## Irish Farmyard Types

CAOIMHIN Ó DANACHAIR

DUBLIN

121 The fundamental need of shelter from the elements and protection during the hours of darkness is doubled for the farmer, who must provide shelter and protection for his livestock, his gear and his harvested crops as well as for himself and his family; the type of shelter which he provides is influenced not only by his traditional methods of using building materials but also by the type of husbandry in which he engages, the local conditions of soil and climate, and his own social and economic position in the community.

132 The climate of Ireland is mild and moist. The average January temperatures range from 40° to 44° F. over the whole country, while those of July range from 57° to 60°, and the average annual rainfall over five-sixths of the country is from 30 to 50 inches, with from 175 to 250 days on which some rain falls. Heavy snow, great cold or long continued frosts are very exceptional, as are long droughts or great heat. In such a mild climate hay and unthreshed corn may be stored outdoors in ricks or stacks, and this was the usual method of storage in Ireland until quite recently; it still is the usual method on many farms. Other crops, such as potatoes and roots, and even grain and apples were, in many parts of Ireland, stored outdoors in suitable pits or containers; this, too, is still often done in the case of potatoes. Consequently storage space for the harvested crops was not the most urgent of the farmer's building needs. Again, the mildness of the climate permits the keeping in the open throughout the year of certain kinds of livestock, such as sheep and dry cattle, while on the other hand milking cows must be kept indoors during the winter and early spring. Thus it may be said that, in general, the size and form of an Irish farmyard depends upon the number of milking cows kept by the farmer.

234 Although, in Ireland, the raising of crops, especially of grain crops, was neither small in volume or unimportant in rural economy, it was in most times and places secondary to cattlebreeding, stock-raising and dairying. The evidence of archaeology and history reveals the importance of cattle from a very early date down to our own time; even yet, in many parts of the country a man's wealth is reckoned not by the size of his farm but by the number of his cattle, and the area of a farm is commonly reckoned by the number of cattle which it will support—"the grass of ten cows" is still a familiar term.

311 Farms are generally classified as small, medium or large, according to their area. A farm of less

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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HOW IRELAND TOOK SHAPE 21

Corrib). Difficulties of communication are such that the Central Plain has never been central in anything more than name: Athlone has become a national centre only with radio communication, and the Shannon remains a boundary river throughout its course. The important part of the plain is the fifty mile stretch which faces the Irish Sea between the bays of Dundalk and Dublin, the heart of the old Kingdom of Meath and of the English Pale, and the setting of Ireland's capital sites from the sacred tombs of New Grange through the age of Celtic Tara to the historic city of Dublin. One factor in the location of this metropolitan area is suggested by Fig. 8; it is favoured by the relatively low rainfall of less than 30 ins.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942  
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

MAN'S CROPS AND ANIMALS 35

It undoubtedly helped the Irish peasants to survive through troubled times, enabled them to live on the hills and waste places to which they were driven, and also to multiply exceedingly in the decades before the great famines of the forties. <sup>175</sup><sub>244</sub>

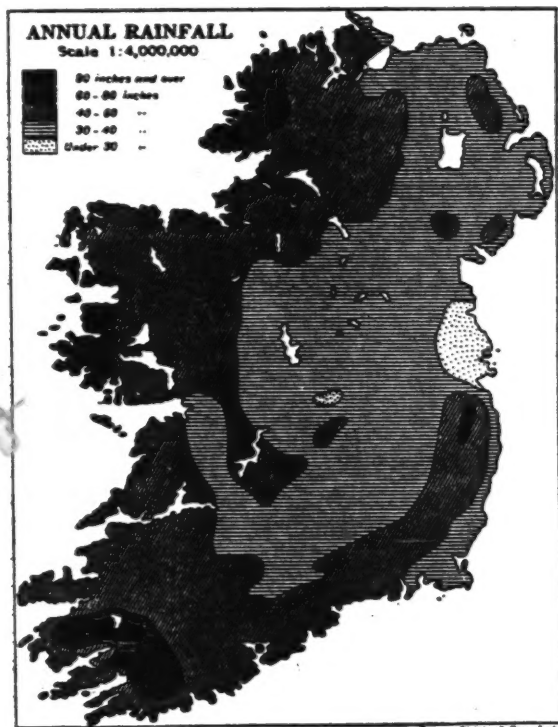


Fig. 8.

It will be well at this stage to say something of the climate and crops of present-day Ireland. The abundant rainfall, the prevailing cloud-cover, the high degree of atmospheric humidity, the strong winds, the cool summers and mild

- 132 winters—all these characteristics are related to the eastward moving stream of cyclones coming off the warm North Atlantic drift. Rain is heaviest wherever mountain masses place obstacles in the path of the moisture-bearing winds, and the peninsulas of Donegal, Connemara and Kerry have from 60 to 100 inches of rain each year (Fig. 8). By contrast the east coast gets about half this amount, while the low-lying tract between Dublin and Drogheda is favoured by a fall of under 30 ins. Everywhere the mildness and the damp encourage grasses and moisture-loving plants, but too often waterlogging has caused green pastures and woodlands to deteriorate into brown bogland. The prolonged autumns, another gift of the Atlantic, are important because they give man a sporting chance of saving his harvests: the heaviest rains are delayed until November and December. Similarly the relatively dry springs (March-May) are conducive to work in field and turf-bog at that season. (Chapter 15).

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Reviewing the distribution of the chief crops and animals to-day, the following facts may be noted. Nearly one half the land devoted to crops, excluding hay, is occupied by oats and perhaps three-quarters of the yield is fed to livestock. Only in the wettest peninsulas of Connemara and Kerry does another crop (potatoes) occupy more land. It is estimated that the "consumption" of potatoes amounts to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  ton per head of the population each year, but the greater part of this goes to pigs and other livestock. The greatest concentration of wheat production is in the comparatively sunny corner of Wexford, with secondary areas along the dry east coast in Cos. Dublin and Down. Recent years have witnessed an increase in wheat growing but there is still far less than in the record years of a century ago. when wheat was being exported to England. Barley, which is more intolerant of damp than wheat, is found on the well-drained soils of Co. Louth but particularly of Wexford and the sheltered valleys of the Nore, Suir and Barrow. It has declined less than wheat because of the demand of the breweries and distilleries, but the drop in the illicit making of poteen has reduced its production in many a secluded spot along the west coast.

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# CHAPTER XV.

## THE BOG.

314 I have called this chapter "the Bog" rather than "Turf" because fuel is not the only product of the Irish turf bogs. The rough grazings once so important in mountain economy (Chapter 6) are commonly located on thin peat, while "buried treasure" is obtained in the form of bog-timber and also, it may be, in objects of wood or metal lost or deposited in the turf in ancient times. Measured by the time and labour of cutting, footing, stacking, and carrying, turf is an expensive fuel. At best, work in the bogs involves a constant struggle against water-logging underfoot and mists and rain overhead: at the worst there comes an occasional season wetter than usual when little or no turf can be won, and the bare countryside must be searched for sticks and rotting timber to burn. In these circumstances dried cowdung is often used as fuel. [237] [372] Moreover, the heavy drain upon all available hands comes in early summer, and the growing crops and livestock are liable to be neglected. "A great impediment to good husbandry," is the verdict of one writer.

The turf is cut in a normal year from the beginning of May onwards, or as soon as the potatoes and corn are in the ground, but the great thing is to begin as early as possible in order to profit from the dry weather of spring. In districts where few crops are grown April, the driest month of the year, is the chosen time. A current of excitement runs through

BROWNE—*Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishshark*. 319

The surface of the land presents much variety, a large part consisting either of moor and bog or of rocky hills, some of which reach a height of nearly 300 feet, but much of the soil is said to be of good quality. There are several small loughs in Inishbofin, lying in the hollows between the hills, and numerous wells and small rills which are kept well supplied by the frequent heavy rains. 133  
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The following description of the islands is given in the memoir of Sheet 83 of the Geological Survey.

With reference to Inishshark the authors say:—

"It is bleak and wild, rocky towards the west and north-west, while there is an envelope of drift on the eastern slopes. At the north-west shore are high and almost perpendicular cliffs.

"As the drift contains numerous angular and semi-angular blocks and fragments of local rocks, it is probably of moraine origin. . . . On Inishshark there are igneous rocks. . . . identical with those which have been called melapyre by Mr. David Forbes. These occur in wide dykes, weathering much more rapidly than the associated schists, and form deep narrow ravines that have the local name of Boher-na-collig (*Anglice*, the road of the old hag or witch). . . . *Inishbofin* has a general E. and W. bearing; on the average it is four miles long and two wide, but the north and south coasts are indented with bays; and at Lough Bofin, from sea to sea, is not half a mile.

"The island consists of five hills, namely, Westquarter, its greatest height being 292 feet; it forms a promontory nearly separate from the rest of the island, being connected by the previously-mentioned low isthmus in which Lough Bofin is situated; Middlequarter, highest peak, 288 feet; Cloonamore, the N.E. hill having a height of 157 feet; Knock, the hill east of the harbour, 271 feet; and, Inishlyon, 143 feet, which is a tidal island, and separated from the other hills during high water. Most of the island is rocky, having a thin peat coating, except the valley of Boffin Harbour, where there is a considerable thickness of drift which gives the island a verdant aspect when viewed from the southward."

The climate is mild even in winter, frost being rare, and snow not lying if it should chance to fall; but these advantages are counterbalanced by the frequent fierce storms which often cut off all communication with the mainland for days, and by the heavy and long-continued rains. 132 ●

The warmth and damp of the climate are probably due, to some extent, to the impinging of part of the Gulf Stream upon the islands, as several of the glass globes set afloat to test the current have been

- 132 washed up on them; at least four of these are now in Inishbofin, and large quantities of drift of various kinds are thrown up on the shores from time to time.

137 The botany and zoology of the islands is outside of the scope of the present Paper, but a few words of general description may help to make the picture of the place more complete.

Here, as elsewhere, on our western coast, there is a tradition that the islands were at one time well wooded; and this is corroborated by the occasional discovery of tree-trunks in the bogs. At the present day, though under the influence of the warm, moist climate, other vegetation flourishes, trees of any sort cannot be got to grow, and all attempts to rear them have hitherto been failures, as the strong winds quickly destroyed them. Even in the most sheltered spots bushes will hardly grow, and there are not a dozen of five feet in height to be found in the islands.

- 136 Large numbers of sea-birds nest on the rocky islets round the coasts; pigeons in large numbers inhabit the caves of Inishahark, and, until within a few years ago, eagles used regularly to nest on a high pinnacle of rock, known as the Boughal, in the channel between the islands. Rabbits and rats are both very plentiful; but hares, bats, weasels, and frogs are not found on either island.

[821] Around the coast, porpoises, sea-otters, and seals (which latter are looked upon as forerunners of stormy weather when they appear) are often seen, and the "sun-fish" (*Selachs maxima*, the great basking shark) appears usually about the end of March; it leaves nearly always before the end of June, and was until a few years ago regularly fished for.

### III.—ANTHROPOGRAPHY.

- 125 1. *Methods*.—These do not require any very extended notice, being practically the same as those employed last year, and described in the report on the Aran investigation. A few changes were made, consisting mainly in the substitution of measurements and instruments shown by experience to be needed, for some which had proved unnecessary, and the use of the new observation form provisionally adopted by the Irish Sub-Committee for the Ethnographic Survey of the British Association. This form, though not perfect, proved to be of much value for field work as, owing to its arrangement, observations can be made with much greater rapidity than is possible by the old system; and the chance of omitting any important point is almost entirely avoided. The economy of time alone is a point of much im-

BROWNE—*Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, & Portacloy.* 589

extreme north point of the peninsula. Off this part of the coast lies Eagle Island, high and rocky in coast and surface, and a lighthouse-station. From Frenchport (or rather Annagh Head, its southern boundary) southward, the coast is sandy beach, shingle, and low rocks, and is backed to a large extent by rolling ranges of sandhills. Off this part of the coast lie Inishkea and Duvillaun, having a sandy or rocky shore, and a surface of no great elevation. The eastern shore along Blacksod Bay and Broadhaven is sheltered and low. 133 [502]

The surface of the Mullet does not reach any very great elevation, the highest point in the northern part being 410 feet above sea level, and the rounded granite hill of Tarmon, in the extreme south, 369 feet. It is much diversified, a good deal of it being fertile land, especially on the east side, but in the north part there is a good deal of bog and moor, and in the south and west rolling sandhills barely held in check by bent. In some of the narrower portions a fertile belt lies between two sandy ones. (134)

The district of Portacloy is a wild mountainous region, with a coast of precipitous cliffs of great height, and riddled with caves. Benwee Head, which rises above the sea to the height of 1000 feet, is just outside the mouth of the deep narrow inlet which forms the harbour. The surface of this part of the district is very wild, and consists largely of bog and mountain. The climate is very mild, frost and snow being of infrequent occurrence and not lasting for long, but the rains are heavy and almost constant during the greater part of the year, and storms are frequent and severe. (504) (132)

Vegetation flourishes well, but, owing to the storms, trees are very few and only grow in sheltered localities. 137

The whole district is largely cut off from the outer world by the wide stretch of wild and sparsely peopled country through which the mail road from Ballina runs.<sup>1</sup> 491

## III.—ANTHROPOGRAPHY.

1. *Methods.*—The methods employed did not differ to any great extent from those made use of on the two previous occasions. A few 125

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. G. H. Kinahan, M.R.I.A., for the following note on the geology of the Mullet:—The south rough portion is granite, while the north rough portion is in part Archæan (query, the equivalent of the Sutherland Algonkian rocks that have been called Old Bay), and in part Archæan quartzite (query, the equivalents of the Scotch Torridan Sandstone); while the central portion is occupied by schists of an uncertain age that lie unconformably on the Archæan rock to the northward. (133)

167 landscape combined with financial help  
 657 of such varied forms that one may see  
 the welfare state in action. Inishbofin,  
 four miles beyond the coast of Conne-  
 [131] mara (10° 10' W. to 10° 15' W.), is sep-  
 arated by a strait almost one mile  
 wide from the nearest inhabited island,  
 Inishark. Some of the neighboring  
 311 small uninhabited islands are useful  
 sheep pastures and others merely reefs  
 132 dangerous to shipping. In calm weather  
 these islands rise above deep clear  
 waters, but in storms Atlantic waves  
 send spray to a height of 300 feet and  
 more<sup>3</sup> and a dangerous swell sweeps  
 through intricate channels. The in-  
 habitants, farmers and farmer-fisher-  
 men are at the mercy of the weather.  
 In 1954 the dry spring resulted in a  
 short growth of oats and barley straw  
 and a feeble growth of potatoes; the  
 fishermen's lobster pots were swept out  
 to sea, replaced and then swept out  
 again; and the hookers could not be  
 taken out in waters always dangerous  
 but vastly more so when the weather  
 consists of an apparently endless series  
 of deep depressions.

505 Isolation is a major problem, but on  
 four days a week in summer and three  
 days a week in winter a hooker runs  
 from the pier at Cleggan to the island,  
 where it is rarely able to berth at the  
 pier, so that all passengers and goods  
 must be put over the side into a cur-  
 ragh and rowed ashore. In winter the  
 island may be storm-bound for as much  
 as a fortnight at a time, and almost  
 [261] every household has a bag of meal kept  
 for such an emergency. Special ar-  
 rangements have to be made for the  
 shipment of cattle; fish can be taken  
 for sale to the mainland in rowing  
 boats only during favorable weather;  
 and no eggs are sold owing to transport

[137] <sup>problems</sup> On the cliffs of the island the vegetation is  
 halophytic and consists generally of a low sward  
 of seapink (*Psamma maritima*).

[p. 203(A)]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957  
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FROM FOREST TO FARMLAND

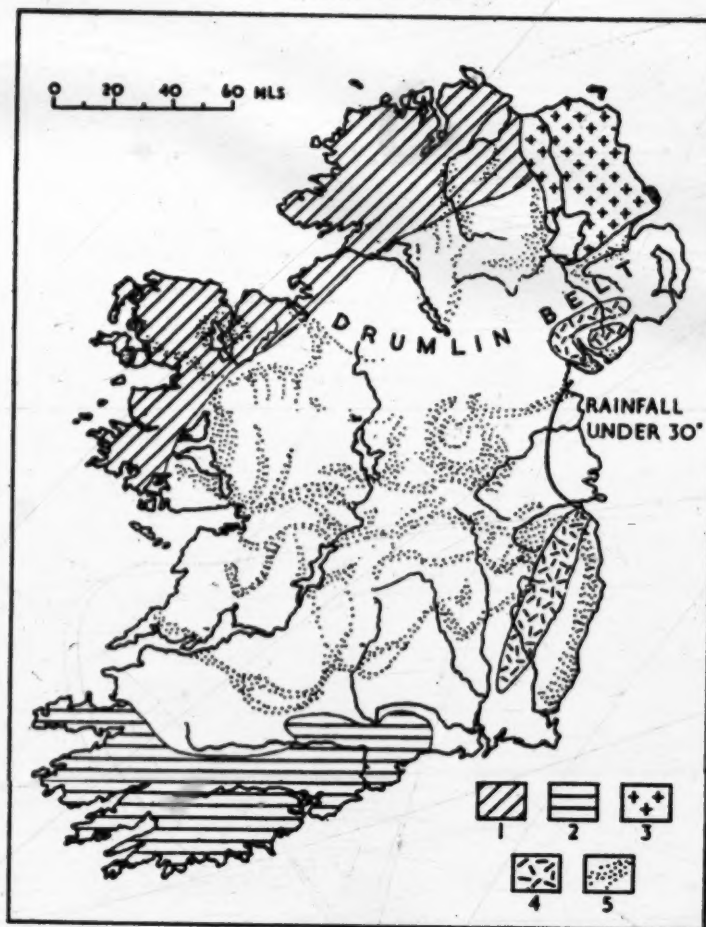


FIG. 3. Some landscape features. (1) Caledonian Highlands, (2) Armorican ridge and valley, (3) North-eastern basalts, (4) Eastern granites, (5) Glacial sands and gravels (eskers) (after J. K. Charlesworth). Drumlins are little hills composed of glacial drift. See Pl. 5, 1.

as they appear. The pattern they make has changed with the centuries in response to new needs and new tools. At present we are in a period of fairly rapid change, for the tractor calls for larger and more regular fields than those made by the spade

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## TURF AND SLANE

and houses. There is a marked loosening of inhibitions at this time. The occasion is something of a festival, of picnic meals and keen appetites, so that tea is said to taste better at turf-cutting than at any other time. After the March winds and the lengthening days of spring have dried the bog surface there is a stirring in the homesteads, the well-worn tools are pulled out of their hiding-places and the smith is kept busy repairing spades and barrows. Bright new tools litter the town pavements on fair day, and the countryman chooses his new slane with an exhibition of caution that seems superfluous until one remembers that an ounce of weight or an inch of length can make the difference between smooth ease and back-break. April, everywhere the driest month of the year, is the best month for cutting: an early start gives the turves a better chance of drying, but the planting of crops keeps the men busy till the end of the month, so that May is the likeliest time to see them in the bogs. There is an old belief that to facilitate drying, peat should be cut when the moon is waning (Pl. 9, 1).

A whiff of turf smoke drifting from a hidden fire where the tea is brewed is the first sign that the bog is peopled. If it is a deep bog you will look in vain for signs of activity, but once you have been seen dozens of heads pop up from deep cuttings and the diggers welcome a break for a smoke and a 'crack'. Turbary rights are extremely complicated, but with the decreasing demand for turf there is little dissension even when banks are communally owned. Nowadays each family generally has its own bank or cutting-face, but it is customary for two or three families to pool their labour and work at each bank in turn. The owner of the bank by tradition provides food for the helpers. On the average a week's cutting provides sufficient fuel for each family, but the time taken and the amount required depend on the nature of the bog and on the quality of the turf. Ideally the season's cut should contain a proportion of brown top turf, that is light sphagnum peat for summer firing, and a proportion of black bottom peat for winter use: this is moist humified peat which dries hard as a brick and burns almost like coal. The amount required is measured by the load, that is the load of a small one-horse cart. I was told in Donegal that a good team of four men, cutting, lifting, wheeling and spreading,

## Climate

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Whether or not the steamer calls at Inis Beag, especially during the winter months when severe storms are frequent, is of considerable psychological significance. The importance of weather conditions as they impinge, both directly and indirectly, on this tiny island far out in the ocean cannot be overemphasized. Most activities, and not only farming and fishing, are more or less affected by the climate, and the past, present, and future states of the weather figure prominently in conversations among the folk. It is customary for individuals when meeting to talk first of the weather before turning to other matters, and some of the common greetings pertain to immediate conditions: "It is raining," "It is windy," or "It is a beautiful day." These are usually the phrases first mastered by non-Gaelic speakers who spend time in Inis Beag, along with the most used greeting—"God bless you." and its reply, "God and Mary bless you."

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The year around climate of Inis Beag might be labeled cool, humid, rainy, and windy, at least by one living in the Great Lakes region of the United States. A perusal of lighthouse records for the decade 1951 to 1960 revealed a mean temperature of 42 degrees (all figures Fahrenheit) for the winter months, December to March, and 59 degrees for the summer ones, June to September. During that decade, the lowest and highest temperatures recorded in Inis Beag, both during 1955, were 28 and 80 degrees respectively. January was the coldest month, with a mean temperature of 39 degrees, and July was the warmest, with 61 degrees. The island is located in a climatic zone in which the average rainfall is 40 to 50 inches per year; the average number of rain days per year is 225, and the average June sun hours per day is five and a half.

Westerly winds predominate in Ireland, though naturally a climate experiencing the passage of so many depressions has winds from every quarter at some time during the year... Winds of gale force are most frequent in the northwest, where they average 40 per year... Most of the gales are from a westerly direction: they are so severe a menace to shipping that many inhabitants of islands and remote coastal districts... profit from periodic salvage hauls... The absence of trees on the exposed western coasts of Ireland is usually regarded as a direct result of the exposure to westerly winds... (Freeman 1960:50-51).

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Snow usually falls several times during the winter, but it melts within hours as the temperature seldom fails to climb above freezing on any day. During the months from June to August, the sea and air are often warm enough to encourage "comfortable" swimming by tourists, usually off the strand. The islanders consider May the ideal month so far as climate is concerned, for the weather tends to be cool, dry, and windy; flowers grow in profusion and birds return in great numbers. March weather, which is much colder but also dry and windy, is called "hard."

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All of the adults of Inis Beag are amateur weather forecasters; however, several old men are considered to be specialists in the art. Some households possess barometers, and forecasts on the radio are listened to attentively by those who own sets. But, in the main, the folk prefer to make their own prognostications based on traditional signs, most of which are sound meteorologically and the outgrowth of

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centuries of careful observations. I collected 250 of these signs and placed them in the following general categories: density, location, and time of mist; type of frost and heaviness of dew; size and position of rings around sun and moon; color and conformation of sky and clouds at particular times of the day; density and location of fog banks; position and time of rainbows; clarity, closeness, and color of Inis Thiar and the mainland; changes in the weather in relation to tides; actions of animals; and pains in the human body. Of special interest are the signs associated with animal behavior, such as the height at which swallows fly, the prevalence of fly hordes, the crowing of roosters and braying of asses, the position that cats assume at the hearth, and whether or not spiders weave their webs across trails. The expert forecaster will weigh together as many as ten signs before announcing his prediction, and I once collected 16 from an old man in Low Village assessing conditions 12 hours hence. Some signs are quite obviously undependable, among them the quacking of ducks which some say will "call" rain, and the scratching of floors and furniture by cats which, according to others, will point the direction of the wind following a shift in the near future. The folk believe that the moon and tides exert a profound influence on both weather and human behavior; my wife on one occasion was told that her "snappish" mood (the words of a neighbor, not mine) was caused by the new moon. 821  
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The climate, in part, determines the conception of seasons held by the islanders. Four seasons are recognized, but their duration deviates from the norm of Western culture. Winter is conceived as embracing only December and January, while spring is thought to commence in February and end in early April. The other two seasons are not so well defined, but most folk agree that summer takes up the greater part of the year—from April until mid-September—and autumn the remaining three months. December and January are regarded as the coldest months, during which time there is a lull in economic activities, but planting begins early in February. Although the prevailing winds during the year are from the west and southwest, for several weeks between January and mid-March icy winds blow steadily from the southeast quarter and cause much physical discomfort and illness. In late March and early April, temperatures rise rapidly, and some islanders believe that March "steals" three days from April so that summer cannot be expected until after April 3rd. The circumstances of the theft are revealed in a legend.

The reason that summer is thought to extend for so long is a psychological one: the folk dislike winter with its cold and dampness and attendant sickness and the sense of isolation from the world that it brings. Few outsiders visit Inis Beag during the winter, and often the steamer is unable to leave port or must turn back because of gales or high seas. It is not out of the ordinary for the island to be totally isolated for a week or ten days because of inclement conditions. From late January on, warm weather is anticipated eagerly, and I was told time and again that summer was imminent when spells of cold and rainy weather occurred between March and June of 1960. During a quarrel with her husband over his confident weather forecasting ability, a woman noted for being an outspoken realist declared, "Inis Beag has only one summer month—July." [154]

The island experiences but eight hours of daylight, from nine o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon, at the time of the winter solstice, and 132

- 132 only four hours of relative darkness, from midnight on, six months later at mid-  
512 summer. People tend to sleep late during the winter, sometimes to nine or even  
132 ten o'clock, and to begin their social activities early in the evening, while in June  
and July they arise an hour or two earlier and work as late as ten o'clock at night.  
My wife and I have attended parties during the 12 days of Christmas when guests  
assembled before eight o'clock, whereas in July we have waited until almost  
midnight for festivities to commence, when darkness afforded privacy of move-  
ment, desirable for reasons to be explained later. Times for meals, feeding and  
milking cattle, and many other enterprises also follow the lengthening and shorten-  
ing of daylight hours from season to season.

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Figure 9. Launching a curach from the strand in stormy weather

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they taken fish which eventually would have found their way into island nets, but they have destroyed with their trawls spawning beds of certain fish and captured lines and nets set out many miles in the ocean by Inis Beag crews. Another reason why fish have become scarce is that shifting currents or other related factors have caused some fish, especially mackerel, to bypass the region. Other coastal areas of Ireland from which fish seldom were taken in quantity in the past now are thriving, and some islanders look hopefully to the future when once again migratory routes will change and bring the fish back. However, even if fish were more available today, it would be difficult to fish for them from *curach* for part of the year because of worsening weather conditions. Storms have increased in number and severity during the winters, and even the summers which once were relatively "calm" are punctuated with long spells of "rough" weather which makes going out in the canoes risky (see Fig. 9). Finally, a seldom admitted factor also must be

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considered—the indolence of the men. Aged fishermen assert that sufficient fish are still available to make serious fishing a highly profitable occupation, but that young men have been "spoiled" by government benevolence and are unwilling to undergo the hardships entailed—"Why rise before dawn and row all day when you can draw the dole?" During 1959, those crews which fished the most averaged between 50 and 60 pounds per man for the season.

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Whereas the efforts of the Irish Free State and the Republic to improve Inis Beag living standards have been directed mostly toward stimulating agriculture and animal husbandry, those of the government before 1922 were focused on making fishing a more productive enterprise. The Congested Districts Board intro-

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Celts. But local legend, historical evidence, and genealogical data collected by my wife and me indicate that the present population is descended from immigrants who came to the island from many parts of Ireland following the Cromwellian incursion of the seventeenth century. The islanders still express bitterness over conditions of poverty and servitude experienced by their ancestors during the 300 years that they lived under absentee Anglo-Irish landlords. All of the excesses of foreign domination suffered by mainland peasants were suffered by the inhabitants of Inis Beag, but were aggravated by the ordinary hardships of island living. Little was known about events in Inis Beag during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries until the island was visited by archeologists and publicized in their scientific writings. The surrounding area of the mainland was very much isolated and seldom visited at that time, although trading between Inis Beag and nearby communities was carried on, and passing ships sometimes called at the island.

Agricultural pursuits have always dominated the subsistence economy of Inis Beag. Most householders own land on which they grow potatoes and other vegetables, grass, and sometimes rye and sally rods and where they pasture cattle, sheep, goats, asses, and horses. The back of the island, behind the communities, is divided into four strips, and each landowner possesses numerous plots located along the "quarter" on which his village fronts. The average combined holding is sixteen acres, and almost 50 percent of the land is composed of arable indigenous and manufactured soils. Potatoes are the staple crop, and they are supplemented by various other vegetables, milk from cattle and goats, meat from island sheep, fish, eggs, and other foods, many of which are imported and sold in the shops. Rye is grown for thatching, and sally rods are used to weave several types of containers. Other subsistence activities (which also provide income for some folk) are knitting, weaving, crocheting, tailoring, and sandal making.

A slowly expanding cash economy features the export of cattle and sheep fattened on the island and of surplus potatoes and fish, the collection of seaweed for extraction of iodine at a mainland factory, the keeping of tourists in private homes, and the manufacturing of craft objects for sale to visitors and for export. At the turn of the century, fishing from canoes—with nets and lines often many miles out in the ocean—was an important subsistence and income activity. A few islanders who owned little or no land lived primarily by fishing and kelp-making. But over the past few decades, fish have become less plentiful and the weather more inclement, especially during winter